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Title : The feeding of sea otters in Southern Kamchatka, Commander and several Kuril islands

Category : Ecology

Student : Not Applicable

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Abstract : For the purpose of researching the feeding of the sea otter in Southern Kamchatka (Utashud isl., c.Lopatka), Commander (Bering, Medny) and Kuril (Shumshu, Paramushir, Urup) islands, 545 samples of scat, collected in 2000 - 2003, have been analysed. To restore the sea urchins' diameter, the height and the width of their teeth were measured (1150 examples).
The sea otter diet included approximately 50 hydrobionts.
In South-eastern Kamchatka the basic food is Bivalvia (100%), mainly Mytilidae family (89%), sea urchins Strongilocentrotus pallidus (66%). Crustacea make 23,5% of the diet, fish - 3,5%. From the coastline of the Okhotsk sea the sea otter diet has a poorer contents.
In North Kuril islands the basis of feeding is shellfish of Mytilidae family (91%), sea urchins Strongylocentrotus (58%), buried mollusks (56%), rarer - Crustacea (30%). S.intermedius, as a part of the diet, has been recorded here for the first time.
In Urup island along the west coast, S.intermedius (90%) predominates among the 3 species of sea urchins of Strongylocentrotus kin. Hythons (75%), crab Dermaturus mandtii (40%) and fish (50%) have got a large importance in the diet.
In Commander islands sea urchins S.pallidus (53%), S.polyacanthus (49%), Molluska of different classes (81%), Crustacea (72%) are the predominate hydrobionts. Fish takes just 29% here. Among the mollusks the role of Mactromeris polynyma (51%) has grown up, mussel is a rather rare species.
Sea urchins, eaten by the animals, have small sizes, the average diameter is 31 mm. However, in the islands Urup and Paramushir the sea otter has been feeding on small urchins for more than 30 years.
Actually, the sea otter diet composition has not changed essentially during the lasting period. Something that really changes is the meaning of different kinds of food, that points indirectly on ecosystem transformations in the sea otters' areas.